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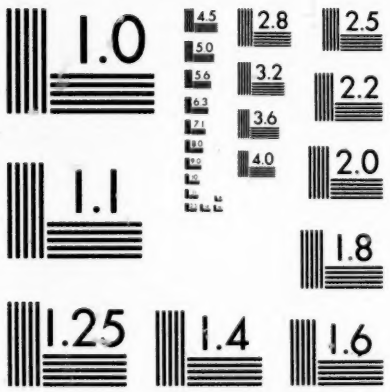

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AUTHOR Hammond, William T., Jr.
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ABSTRACT

Stating that little has been done to improve listening skills, the author (1) lists some of the various definitions assigned to listening; (2) examines the dichotomy between the listening goals of two- and four-year colleges and the actual time colleges spend in listening instruction; (3) reports on the standard listening practice of note-taking as an ineffective means of improving listening comprehension; and (4) points out the confusion and contradictions surrounding the information on listening. His concluding remark urges recognition of the need for an organized and coordinated program in this area. A reference list is included. (HS)

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William T. Hammond, Jr.
Clayton Junior College
Morrow, Georgia 30260

Teaching Listening Skills in the Junior College Reading Program

Session: Reading Instruction for the Junior College Student

Listening Instruction has had a long and unique history in American Education. It would appear that while it has been known and accepted for quite some time that listening is a, if not the, fundamental communicative skill very little has been done to develop proven techniques and methods of teaching listening skills. Though there is much evidence to support the conclusion that listening in a needed skill in the college and junior college reading program it appears that little is being done to include it in the reading programs.

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As is often the case in education, the experts disagree on a fundamental definition. Petrie (36), in a detail investigation of the various philosophies of listening could only conclude that it was generally agreed that the term "listening" implied more than the mere perception of sound. The difficulties, says Petrie, in deriving more concrete statements as to the nature of listening stem from the fact that listening is a dynamic, psycho-physical process about which we lack adequate knowledge. There are, however, a number of documented insights into the listening process. As early as 1926, Rankin (38) reported that some 42% of our language using time was spent in listening. Gigous (16), Heilman (21) and others have given further support to these findings. Further, Childers (10) has stated "Listening ability is a modifiable skill which is less a function of intelligence and more a function of learning..." Devine (11) concluded that critical listening abilities could be improved at all levels of mental ability examined. These facts would tend to lead on to conclude that listening is much used and modifiable skill which should be given attention and direction.

Indeed, on the college and junior college level listening is a very necessary skill. B. Lamar Johnson (24) has described "listening with understanding" as one of the goals of general education in junior colleges. Bird (2) reported three separate studies which

indicated that listening is more important than reading for success in 38 - 42% of college courses taken by freshmen. Yet, despite the evidence only one conclusion can be drawn as to the state if listening skills being taught in our colleges and junior colleges - the instruction is minimal if it is taught at all. Brown (6), Brewster (4), Cartier (8), Irvin (3) and Nichols (35) all concluded that of the different groups of college students studied few of the various methods of listening instruction being used were successful and then only minimally.

When these facts are compared with the expressed goals of colleges and junior colleges in relation to listening skills the results are enlightening, if disappointing. Lewis (31) found that after surveying a wide variety of approaches being used in freshman communication courses, very little emphasis was being placed on listening. Similarly, Markgrof (34) found that 81% of all the professors solicited in a survey felt that a unit on teaching listening methods should be included but only 44.5% of the methods courses actually had such units. Heilman (20) noted that little attention was paid to listening skills in textbooks and that the methods of teaching listening were vague. This would lead to the conclusion that while the colleges and universities recognize the importance of listening skills it is still a neglected aspect of the college curriculum.

Another interesting and much discussed aspect of listening is its

relation to reading. Many instructors of reading have generally assumed that listening ability improves as reading ability improves. For this reason, structured or systematic instruction in listening is not usually a planned part of the reading program in many colleges and junior colleges. The research tends not to support this position. Stromer (42) found that while it is possible to improve listening comprehension through training in listening, it did not seem possible to increase significantly reading comprehension through training in listening. Caffrey (7), Irving (23), Horn (22) and Stroud (37) drew similar conclusions despite a high correlation between listening and reading .60 - .82. In her excellent booklet, Sara Lundsteen (33) suggests that be due to lack of systematic training, listening ability may actually become less efficient as reading skill and age increase. The result being adults with poor listening habits. She further states that there is some evidence that instruction in listening may bring improvement in reading skill.

In an investigation of one of the "standard" listening practices of college and junior college instructors of Reading, McClendon (35) found that barious tested methods of note-taking made no significant difference on listening comprehension whether the student took no notes, main points, copious notes on factual detail or regular notes. In short, McClendon found note-taking

exercises as an ineffective method of improving listening comprehension. Yet, the practice persists.

Finally, there are those who would question the practice of perscriptive teaching of listening. Hackett (18) suggests that there is little evidence that knowledge about listening contributes to the ability to listen. In other words, the lists of do's and don'ts of good listening which are much a part of the materials of the various listening techniques have not been proven valid. Hackett brings up an interesting point because too often these lists are accepted and used without any investigation into their validity.

Clearly, the confusion and contradiction surrounding listening instruction has come about, in part, from a lack of coordination. While there have veen several outstanding individual efforts to collect infromation on listening (Bird (3), Duker (12)(13), Leeds (30), Keller (26) and Lundsteen (33)) the effort is still lacking. Perhaps Lundsteen's (32) suggestion of "a nationally organized program for economical and scientific progress in assisting in the development of critical thinking/listening skills should be considered. Certainly, there is a definite need for an organized and coordinated program in this area. If we recognize the Right to Read, we should further recognize the Need to Listen.

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